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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (11/24): RESISTING "SOFT" U.S.
PRESSURE ON ABBAS

Main Stories:

The three papers lead with detailed reports and photos documenting the November 23 PLO Central Council meeting in Ramallah. The body held its periodic, symbolic vote electing Palestinian Authority (PA) President Abbas to the post of "Palestinian State President," according to headlines. Addressing the gathering, Abbas declared his intentions to call PA presidential and legislative elections early next year, should national dialogue between PLO factions and Hamas fail. Al Hayat Al Jadida adds that Hamas leader Zahhar rejects early elections and has called for the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) to serve out its term until 2010. In statements, Zahhar and Abbas traded blame for the failure of Palestinian talks in Cairo. In related news, Al Hayat Al Jadida's front page cites Israel's Haaretz newspaper revealing a classified Israeli security document that recommends blocking PA elections, "even at the cost of differences with the U.S." out of fears of a weakened PA and stronger Hamas.

On its front page, Al Quds cites DPA in quoting Hamas leader Ayman Taha confirming on November 23 that Hamas has achieved agreement with other Palestinian factions on halting rocket attacks on Israel in return for a reopening of Gaza crossings. Taha stated that it was too early to discuss extending the ceasefire with Israel that expires next month. However, Al Quds reports that London-based daily Al Hayat noted that Egypt has already secured an agreement with all parties to extend the ceasefire in return for reopening crossings.

Reporting on the suffering of Gaza civilians continues. UNRWA chief Abu Said repeats on Al Ayyam's front page, calls from the weekend that Israel allow the entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza. Jordan's King Abdullah calls on Israel to lift the Gaza "siege" and warns of

a humanitarian crisis in the Strip, on an inside page of Al Quds. Over the weekend, Al Quds reported that Israel reassured the King that it has no intention of launching a full-scale attack on Gaza in an effort to remove Hamas rule. In other Gaza news, Al Quds' inside page reports that Israel barred Catholic Church clerics from entering Gaza. The clerics were en route to celebrate mass, "to highlight that the Holy See is close to the people in Gaza and its Christian communities in these difficult days." Reporting notes that three churches serve Gaza's 2,000 Christians, who are mainly Catholic and Greek Orthodox.

Al Quds' front page cites "media sources" revealing president-elect Obama's plan for solving the Middle East conflict. The paper reports that his plan is based on the following points: Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders with certain adjustments, compensation for Palestinian refugees instead of the right to return, and a united Jerusalem as a capital for two states. The paper expects there to be active U.S. engagement in the Middle East peace process once Hilary Clinton assumes office as Secretary of State and General James Jones assumes the post of National Security Council chief. In related reporting, papers note comments by Palestinian Authority President Abbas to the PLO Central Council addressing the "impasse" of Israeli-Palestinian final status talks. "We insisted on participating in negotiations so as not to give Israel, the U.S. or the Quartet any pretext for saying that we do not want to negotiate, however; we do not go to those negotiations only to negotiate [but to get results]," Abbas stated.

Al Quds' front page reports that Palestinians in the West Bank city of Hebron are suffering continued attacks by Israeli settlers and

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that the Hebron Municipal Council has called for a lifting of the Israeli closure of the Hebron Old City. Al Hayat Al Jadida's front page reports that Israeli settlers occupying a disputed Palestinian house in Hebron, have been joined by 150 additional settlers who have barricaded themselves inside the house to prevent eviction, in accordance with an Israeli court order. In related news, Al Quds' inside page reports that Israeli Defense Minister Barak is considering a cut-off of electricity and water supplies to West Bank outposts.

Al Hayat Al Qida's front page reports that President Bush and Israel's Premier Olmert will hold a farewell meeting at the White House on November 24. The paper adds that Olmert is seeking last-minute promises from Bush regarding Iran policy. Another report appears on the same page stating that president-elect Obama will announce his economic team on November 24.

Weekend stories

Sunday, November 23

Front pages led with news from the second Palestine Investment Conference, opened in Nablus on November 21. Al Hayat Al Jadida's headline reads, [Palestinian Authority (PA)] "President Abbas: No sustainable development under occupation, and no economic, social, or political life without security." Al Quds' headline also highlighted a message from PA Prime Minister Fayyad that, "We are committed to creating an environment conducive to investment and attractive to investors." Papers reported extensively on Abbas' remarks which included an explanation of the role of government in stimulating economic investment, Palestinian national dialogue, and the peace process. The conference "endorsed" a package of important projects valued at \$490 million. Al Hayat Al Jadida and Al Ayyam reported on front pages that Israeli Army radio announced on November 22 that an advanced American anti-missile radar system, set up by the U.S. in southern Israel, will become operational in mid-December. Reporting notes that the installation of the radar system comes on the backdrop of increased Israeli concerns over Iran's nuclear program.

Saturday, November 22

Al Quds' lead headline read, "Israel establishes a network of West Bank streets and roads to seize as much land as possible ahead of a peace settlement." Quoting Israeli daily Haaretz, the report

continued that Israel is spending 250 million Shekels on the, "settlement roads to nowhere." In related news, the dailies revealed that the Israeli military has issued an order to "seize" four Palestinian houses in Hebron for use as military barracks. The barracks will serve to restrict the movement of Palestinians living near the Israeli Qiryat A'rba settlement, north of Hebron, according to reporting.

"An official secret Israeli document allows Israeli interrogators to use torture and psychological techniques on Palestinian detainees," Al Quds' front page reported.

All dailies frontpaged news with photos about the injuring of several Palestinians and international solidarity activists, including a Nobel peace laureate, on November 21, during the weekly anti-wall and anti-settlement protests in the West Bank villages of Ni'lin, Bi'lin, and Ma'sara. Israeli military fired rubber bullets and tear gas on the protestors. Clashes broke out in Ni'lin when protestors threw stones and clashes lasted for more than four hours in Bi'lin, according to reporting.

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BLOCK QUOTES:

1) Al Quds daily editorial is titled, "The national and international duty to immediately end Gaza suffering" (11/24): It is no longer possible to put off ending the suffering of one and a half million Palestinians in Gaza, regardless of Israeli, Arab or international pretexts that remain insensitive to the death, illness and hunger of children, the elderly and women... Any Israeli plans for a massive military offensive will come at a high price, especially in humanitarian terms, and they will change many facts at the regional and international levels."

2) Regular columnist Hasan Al Batal opines in Al Ayyam under the title, "A soft political siege on Abbas' authority!" (11/24): "[PA] President Abbas... in his speech in Nablus the other day... [clearly alluded to the] American side pressuring him not to attend a U.N. Security Council session... to discuss Jewish settlement activities in the West Bank. The President didn't respond to the pressure and attended the [September] session... without explicitly naming General Fraser, President Abbas wondered about a "classified report" written by this... [General] in charge of the Road Map peace plan, after the Annapolis conference. Why should this report remain "secret" or "top secret" and be given only to Ms. Condoleezza Rice...?"

Walles